

Distribution Advisory Group

Meeting 3 – Wednesday, 21 April 2021

COMMUNIQUE

The third meeting of the Distribution Advisory Group was chaired by the A/g First Assistant Secretary, Health Workforce Division, Department of Health, via videoconference on 21 April 2021.

Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network Presentation

Mr Richard Nankervis, CEO, Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network, provided members with a presentation on the impacts of the Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification system on general practices in the Hunter New England and Central Coast region. Members noted the report and thanked Mr Nankervis for his presentation.

Impact of COVID-19 and bushfire MBS items on DPA 2021

The Department presented the committee with analysis on temporary COVID-19 and bushfire MBS items with a DPA equivalent to assess whether these MBS items should be used in the 2021 DPA update. The data indicates certain catchments have a higher growth of these MBS items, mainly in Victoria. During the meeting it was agreed that further work was required to better understand the impact of telehealth (from outside the catchment) once final MBS data is available. Members noted the impact of COVID-19 and bushfire MBS items may have on DPA 2021, and agreed some adjustment may be required as part of the 1 July update.

Proposed changes to District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) methodology

Members considered the positive feedback provided by stakeholders on the proposed update to the DWS methodology. Members agreed that implementation of these proposed changes should occur on 1 January 2022, to allow time for further consultation with affected stakeholders. Members agreed that the July 2021 update would use the current methodology.

Towns raising concerns about DPA (GPs) or DWS (Specialists) status.

Members discussed a number of towns raising concerns about their DPA or DWS status. The discussion considered the Full-time Service Equivalent (FSE) number of GPs or specialists in each location, any changes to health services, or whether other factors may have significantly affected each area's access to GP or specialist services. Members agreed to continue to monitor these towns in the lead up to the upcoming DPA and DWS updates. Members also agreed to further consider the impacts of implementing the proposed DWS methodology changes on the towns raising concerns on their DWS status out of session.

Additional Business – Aligning Distribution Models

The Department tabled a paper outlining the features of Department of Health distribution models including DWS for Specialists, DPA and the assessment tool used for the Visas for GPs program. This is to seek member views on the range of indicators of health workforce and service access in the different distribution models. Members noted the paper and agreed to consider these models prior to the next meeting planned for September 2021.

Members in attendance for the 21 April 2021 meeting were:

- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Australian Medical Association
- Department of Health
- National Rural Health Alliance
- Primary Health Networks
- Rural Workforce Agency Network
- Independent Advisors (2)